DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY

COMPLETE STATEMENT OF

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COMMANDER

NORTHWESTERN DIVISION U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

BEFORE

THE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES AND ENVIRONMENT

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ON

THE MISSOURI RIVER FLOOD: AN ASSESSMENT OF RIVER MANAGEMENT IN 2011 AND OPERATIONAL PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the Missouri River flooding of 2011, as well as the ongoing and future activities of the Northwestern Division of the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to respond to the flood. I am Brigadier General John McMahon, Commander of the Northwestern Division of the Corps. The Corps is fully cognizant of the physical, economic, social and emotional impacts to many people in the basin due to the flooding this year.

Actions by the Omaha and Kansas City Districts during the Missouri River flooding this summer were extremely effective in reducing flood damages. The Corps expended approximately $83 million on fortifying existing levees, building temporary levees, monitoring dam and levee safety and other activities, such as providing flood fight supplies to state emergency offices, within Corps authorities under Public Law 84-99. For example, in South Dakota, the Corps constructed approximately four miles of temporary levees at Pierre and Ft. Pierre, and approximately 1.5 miles of temporary levees in the community of Dakota Dunes. Temporary measures were also constructed for the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe to mitigate risk to the causeway and the water intake.

The Missouri River Mainstem Reservoir System was operated in 2011 in accordance with the Master Manual. The water conditions in the Missouri basin have been extraordinary this year, particularly above Sioux City, Iowa. Compared to the normal 25 million acre feet of runoff, we expected this year's runoff to exceed 60 million acre feet, more than double the average and the highest on record. Of critical importance is the understanding that May, June and July were the third, first and fifth highest months of inflow in the 113-year period of record.

Each year, the Corps evacuates flood control space before the spring and summer runoff occurs. This year was no different. All of the 2010 flood water had been evacuated by late January and we had the entire required 16.3 million acre feet of space available at the start of this year's runoff season. Our computer models demonstrate that, since 1898, this storage would have been enough every previous year to adequately capture spring runoff and manage water flow throughout the system.

We witnessed a tremendously different set of data this year. Consequently, we are taking a hard analytical look at what this information may suggest in terms of future operation alternatives and adjustments. In addition to the Corps internal review of reservoir operations, we initiated an external review of our operations, which is currently underway. We anticipate this external review will be completed between mid-December and early January and it will be made available to this Committee and the public at that time.

The Corps followed (and continues to follow) a carefully evaluated water evacuation plan over the past several months. High releases were maintained through mid-August and then stepped down at a pace that reduced risk to infrastructure, levees and river banks and allows the flood plain to drain. The plan includes fall and winter release rates low enough to allow continued inspection and repair of both federal and non-federal

infrastructure. The Missouri River Flood of 2011 officially concluded on October 1, 2011 when flows fell below flood stage at Rulo, Nebraska.

The water evacuation plan in place is allowing homeowners, farmers and businesses back on their properties to begin repair and recovery as quickly as possible. The objective of the plan is to bring the entire system back to its full annual flood control capacity by the 2012 runoff season. In addition, we are committed to maintaining a flexible posture and aggressive release schedule throughout the winter and spring if it appears that 2012 will be another high runoff year.

Now that the river is receding, we are initiating post-flood actions. These include: 1) an assessment to review the water management operation, 2) a technical review of the flood fight response and, 3) a concerted effort to assess and repair infrastructure, such as dams, levees, and navigation structures.

Concurrent with these actions, the Corps, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture are co-chairing the Missouri River Flood Task Force (MRFTF). The Task Force provides a forum for coordination among the federal, tribal, state, stakeholder and local governmental partners within the States of Nebraska, Montana, Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota, Wyoming, Kansas, and Missouri on flood recovery and related flood risk management actions and initiatives. The Task Force will streamline governmental processes and decision making, accelerate necessary assessments, coordinate permitting requirements, and apply agile and critical thinking to the problem set.

Since May, 2011, the Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works) has exercised her emergency authority provided in Public Law 84-99 to transfer funds from other appropriation accounts to the Flood Control and Coastal Emergencies appropriation account to respond to the flooding and to begin addressing repairs from this year's disasters. To date, the Corps has completed five transfers totaling $282 million. The last two transfers, totaling $207 million, allowed the Corps to begin addressing a portion of the highest priority life and safety repair requirements nationwide.

In order to develop the best estimates of repair requirements nationwide, local Corps districts and divisions, including the Northwestern Division, working with non-Federal sponsors, are inspecting damaged projects and preparing assessments reports. The Corps has set up a rigorous process at the Headquarters level for technical experts to examine the requirements and to prioritize those requirements based on risk to life and safety, among other parameters. The Corps is prioritizing projects to leverage its resources to complete assessments and proceed forward with the highest priority repairs. To date, $54.6 million has been used for Missouri River flood recovery.

We recently concluded eight open house sessions and public meetings in cities throughout the basin to listen to the concerns of citizens as part of the Annual Operating Plan development for 2012. As part of the meetings, we communicated that the top priority of the Division is to responsibly prepare for the 2012 runoff season.

A primary concern raised in the public meetings was the Corps' strategy to only evacuate water from the Missouri River reservoir system back to the designed amount of flood control storage. The reservoir system was designed with 16.3 million acre feet of flood control storage, which equates to approximately 22 percent of the storage in the reservoir system. Given record runoff, the Corps has initiated a technical analysis to determine whether more reservoir space might need to be reserved for flood control purposes.

At this point, the Corps plans to assume a more flexible posture as water is evacuated through the system for the remainder of the fall and early winter. =The Corps will also take a more aggressive stance with winter and spring releases. Third, the Corps will communicate more frequently and more broadly as the 2012 season unfolds. We will conduct bi-monthly conference calls and, during those calls, the dialogue will continue with federal, state, county and local officials, Tribes, emergency management officials, independent experts and the press to discuss conditions on the ground and current Corps' reservoir release plans and forecasts. Audio files of the conference calls will be widely available.

In summary, the 2011 flooding was the result of hydrologic events. While much damage in the basin, the system of dams and levees functioned as intended and provided substantial benefit. Without them, the damages and safety risks would have been much greater. While there are important repairs that need attention, no major deficiencies have been identified to date that would preclude normal operation of the dams in spring of 2012.

This concludes my testimony. Thank you for allowing me to testify about the flooding in 2011 and future operation of the Missouri River system. I would be happy to answer any questions you or other Members of the Subcommittee may have.